



Bedford Fire Station Project Frequently Asked Questions



Following several years of studies and analyses of potential sites for a new fire station, the Bedford Select Board have selected to acquire the property at 139 The Great Road in order to build a new facility.

A warrant article to approve and fund the acquisition of this property, as well as fund design and project management services for a new fire station, will be considered at the 2022 Annual Town Meeting.

In addition to the information below, please visit www.bedfordma.gov/new-fire-station to learn more, and consider attending the public forum. You can also email the Town Manager's office at townmanager@bedfordma.gov with questions.

The Need for a New Fire Station

1. Why does Bedford need a new fire station?

As the need for emergency services has grown, the existing fire station building and property does not meet the current (and future) needs of you and your neighbors.

2. What is the condition of the current fire station?

The building is 12,300 square feet and was originally constructed in 1949. It has undergone several renovations in the years since then. While it has been well maintained like any public building in Bedford, it is plagued with numerous infrastructure and safety issues and is not able to serve the needs of a modern department. Jobs in the community increased from 18,805 to 23,477 from 2009 to 2019, and the daytime population of Bedford (in non-pandemic times) is more than double the census population. As Bedford's daytime population has increased, departmental call volume has as well. Additionally, the Fire Department's staffing, equipment, and number of vehicles have increased to respond to these needs, while the building has remained the same size. Please view this video tour for more information: https://youtu.be/TPpH_bIfnAw

Among the problems cited by consultants:

- Life safety and code compliance issues include electrical, plumbing, and accessibility problems, as well as water damage and infiltration
- Inadequate and outdated living quarters create challenges with expanding staff and staff needs
- A shortage of space for program needs including training and administration
- A lack of space for supply and storage, with storage areas overflowing, creating trip and obstruction safety hazards
- No isolated decontamination area or climate controlled medical storage area
- An inadequate footprint, an inadequately sized front apron, lack of rear parking, and no ability to expand in any direction
- Only three bays (doors) face the street for four front-line vehicles, requiring firefighters/staff to use a rear bay, creating a delay in response
- Insufficient floorspace and garage door height and width for the modern fire vehicles and equipment that are required to meet the community's needs
- Bays are congested with vehicles, equipment, and the exhaust system, and vehicles must be moved onto the too-short front apron to be properly cleaned and restocked

Meeting the Need for a New Fire Station

1. What is the history of planning for a new station?

Studies in the early 1990s forecasted that the current Fire Station would not meet the long-term space needs of the Department. Following a renovation in 1998, it was recognized that the site would have to be evaluated again within ten to fifteen years.

The Town commissioned a study in 2015 to evaluate the space needs of the Fire Department. The architectural firm CDR Maguire and public safety consultant Public Safety Strategies produced a report featuring the following recommendation: "Based on the building evaluation and the programmatic needs of the department, the station needs to be expanded or replaced. The space that requires the most expansion is the apparatus bay and the associated appurtenances, which due to the site restrictions will be very difficult to expand without a comprehensive renovation."

The three options available to the Town at the time were to renovate the existing building, tear down the existing building and construct a new fire headquarters on the existing site, or construct a new facility on a different site. Guided by the expert consultants and after careful review and consideration, the Town evaluated the three options, the Town ruled out the current site due to site limitations, including the need to acquire 30,000 square feet of additional land that would include multiple residential properties.

2. Why was the planned location selected?

Public Safety consultants hired by the Town evaluated current Fire Department operations in order to identify where in town a new station could be located with the fewest adverse impacts on the delivery of services to the public. This resulted in a target area primarily along The Great Road. Within this area, the consultants looked at a variety of potential sites, evaluating them for such factors as positive/negative impact on current emergency response baseline, response times, travel routes of fire vehicles, space needs, cost and overall impact on the community. As part of that evaluation process, the Select Board advised that residential properties should not be considered.

In 2020, The Select Board proposed taking 171 and 175 The Great Road by eminent domain at a then cost of up to \$7.6 million at the 2020 Annual Town Meeting, but COVID-19 uncertainty led to an indefinite postponement of that warrant article. In addition to COVID-19 uncertainty, Town officials considered resident feedback regarding the proposed cost as well as the use of eminent domain. Town staff, along with expert consultants, again reviewed potential options to see if another parcel that fit the criteria could be acquired—this exercise was expanded to include parcels in the Historic District.

Subsequently, the Town contacted Utah State University, the owners of 139 The Great Road, a single parcel that fits the lot size requirements identified by expert analyses, and learned it was being prepared for sale. The Town and the university then entered conversations. Analyses by consultants have determined that the site would be able to accommodate a fire station that fits the programmatic needs of the department. The sale cost of the property would be \$1.55 million, representing a cost savings of approximately \$6 million compared to the 2020 proposal. In addition to the cost savings, moving forward with this site would lead to a time savings of 1-2 years in avoiding the costly and lengthy eminent domain process.

Due to careful planning and fiscal management, the Select Board are ready to go forward with this plan that meets the needs of Bedford.

3. *What are the characteristics of 139 The Great Road?*

139 The Great Road is 1000 feet from the current station on The Great Road. The new facility would encompass approximately 21,000 square feet of building, on an approximately 65,000 square foot lot; the size of the lot meets the current and 20-year operational and programmatic requirements of the department.

4. *Why not build on other land the Town already owns?*

There have been several studies that have analyzed the future programmatic needs of the Fire Department and the Town and which, if any, Town-owned properties could fit the need. Several Town-owned properties were reviewed as potential relocation sites, but none meet the requirements for a new site, including space and programmatic requirements for current and future needs, response times, and access to major roads. Some of the possible sites would have abutted or encroached on recreational land, reduced playing fields, had legally binding permanent deed restrictions, impacted historical areas, and possibly created safety issues.

For example:

- Veterans Memorial Park has permanent deed restrictions and development of the land would result in a loss of open space
- The playing fields at Mudge Way would present challenging access to a main road, negative impacts on school and town campuses, and a loss of a highly utilized recreational space
- The Town-owned garage on the V.A. grounds has permanent deed restrictions, would not meet response time requirements, has challenging access to a main road, and would result in substantial residential neighborhood impacts
- Renovating the Department of Public Works building into a fire station or public safety complex would require building a new DPW building on a new site (108 Carlisle Road has been ruled out as a possibility). The total project would likely cost significantly more than the 139 The Great Road project would cost. Most importantly, response times would not meet requirements.

5. *Why not keep the current station and build an additional substation?*

To meet the programmatic and response needs of the community, a centrally located fire headquarters is required to maintain the level of service provided to the Town. Building an additional substation would cost an estimated \$5.7 million to build and \$1.6 million per year to operate, on top of a new Fire headquarters. A substation would not alleviate the need for a new fire station headquarters. Building on the current site would also require a temporary headquarters to be built, resulting in significant additional costs and time delays. The idea of a substation has been examined, and ruled out, repeatedly by expert consultants.

6. *How will this affect department responses time throughout the town?*

The proposed site is 1000 feet from the current station on The Great Road and will have minimal impact on current response times. Impacts on response times was the most important criteria in selecting a site for the new fire station.

7. *How will this affect traffic?*

An independent traffic study prepared within the last six months has shown that the new station would not negatively impact traffic or safety on The Great Road. Any improvements installed at the Hillside-Great Road-Bacon intersection would be made with the intention of improving safety conditions for all

road users. As with the current station, emergency response vehicles rarely need to use audible sirens in the vicinity of the fire station.

8. *Will this building be subject to the Demolition Delay Bylaw (Article 57)?*

No, properties in the Historic District are not subject to the Demolition Delay Bylaw. However, the project would be subject to Historic District Commission review, as well as zoning, code enforcement, health, and environmental reviews. In the design process, the Town would strive to ensure that the design of the new building and its grounds takes into account the distinctive and historic features of its surroundings. There are many examples in other communities of fire stations built in historically sensitive ways in a variety of settings. The current fire station is also in the Historic District.

9. *What would happen to the current station?*

At this time, The Select Board does not have plans for the land parcel after the building is no longer needed, and will be considering the Town's overall current and future space needs before making any decisions.

Paying for a New Station

1. *How much will this cost?*

Acquiring the land will cost \$1.55 million. The projected cost of the new fire facility, including design and construction, is \$18.2 million (\$2 million for design and project management and \$16.2 million for construction). The estimated tax impact for land acquisition and design/ project management will be included in the Town Meeting Warrant.

2. *What is this property currently producing in property tax receipts?*

As this property is currently owned by an educational institution, the property is currently classified as tax-exempt, so it does not produce any property tax.

3. *Will there have to be an override or debt exclusion to pay for it?*

No, this capital authorization would not require an override of Proposition 2½. Like other building projects, funding for the station will be acquired via a bond issue. Thanks to decades of prudent capital and fiscal planning, the Town has set aside enough future bonding capacity to financially account for the land acquisition while staying under the best practice policy of using no more than 10% of its annual budget for debt service.

The Process and Next Steps

1. *What is the approval process for this project?*

The first step is acquiring the property. The Select Board will sign a purchase and sale agreement, contingent on Town Meeting approval. Then, there will be warrant articles at Annual Town Meeting to appropriate \$1.55 million to purchase the property and \$2 million for design and project management services. Per Massachusetts General Laws, previous discussions of land acquisition at Select Board's meetings have occurred in executive session (which are closed to the public).

2. *What is the text of the Warrant Article?*

The warrant article for land acquisition of 139 The Great Road and design of a new fire station will be finalized in mid-February. The warrant will be mailed to all Bedford households and posted online.

3. *Is the town paying a fair price for the land?*

Yes. In order to perform due diligence, the Town contracted with an independent, commercial real estate appraiser to propose a fair value to the seller. The seller, Utah State University, conducted its own independent appraisal as well. The Town's interests are protected via contingencies in the purchase and sale agreement.

4. *If Town Meeting approves this, will any further votes be necessary?*

If land acquisition and design/project management services are approved in March 2022, a vote to authorize construction costs is expected to be on the warrant for Town Meeting in 2023.

5. *When would the new station be open?*

Pending successful land acquisition and design (2022-2023), followed by a period of construction (2023-2025), the anticipation is to occupy the new station in 2025.

6. *Will there be a public forum to learn more about this project?*

Yes, there will be several opportunities to learn more, ask questions, and share your thoughts.

A public forum will be held on Thursday, February 17, 2022 at 7:00 p.m. on Zoom (<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85697880909?pwd=SVY1M1MrbEo4MUIXbDg0aFVnNHpldz09>). A separate meeting with direct abutters will also be held. Additionally, Town Boards will be considering this project, and links to view those videos will be posted on the project website along with other background information (<http://www.bedfordma.gov/new-fire-station>).